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ABSTRACT

Nowadays all schools must be prepared to meet the challenge of an increasingly diverse student population, including many students who are not proficient in English. The effectiveness of various program models for language minority students remains the subject of controversy, and there are several factors to consider when selecting a program model: (1) district or school demographics, (2) student characteristics, and (3) district or school resources. English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) programs (rather than bilingual programs) are likely to be used in districts where the language minority population is very diverse and represents many different languages. There are several different types of ESL programs: ESL pull-out, ESL class period, and ESL resource center. Bilingual program models, which use the students' home language, in addition to English for instruction, are most easily implemented in districts with a large number of students from the same language background. There are three types of bilingual programs: early-exit, late-exit, and two-way . There are other programs that provide neither instruction in the native language nor direct instruction in ESL, but that have adapted instruction to meet the needs of students who are not proficient in English. Two such programs are sheltered English or content-based programs, and structured immersion programs. Researchers have identified a number of attributes that are characteristic of effective programs for language minority students. (AB)

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ERIC Digest
Clearinghouse on Language and Linguistics

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Digest

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ESL and Bilingual Program Models

(EDO-FL-94-01)

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Children from families in which English is not the language of the home represent a rapidly increasing percentage of students enrolled in U.S. schools. Language minority students can be found in schools across the country, not just those in large cities or in areas near the U.S.-Mexican border. All schools must be prepared to meet the challenge of an increasingly diverse student population, including many students who are not proficient in English.

The effectiveness of various program models for language minority students remains the subject of controversy. Although there may be reasons to claim the superiority of one program model over another in certain situations (Collier 1992; Ramirez, Yuen, and Ramey 1991), a variety of programs can be effective. The choice should be made at the local level after careful consideration of the needs of the students involved and the resources available.

Factors to Consider in Selecting a Program Model

It is critical to consider several variables that will ultimately influence the type of program most likely to be appropriate and effective in a given situation.

1. **District or school demographics.** While some districts have a large population of students from a single language background, others have several large groups of students, each representing a different home language. Still others may have small numbers of students from as many as 100 different language backgrounds scattered across grade levels and schools. The total number of language minority students, the number of students from each language background, and their distribution across grades and schools will influence the selection of the type of program to meet the needs of district students (McKeon, 1987).

2. **Student characteristics.** Some language minority students enter U.S. schools with strong academic preparation in their native language that may equal or surpass that of their grade-level peers in the United States. Others, however, may arrive in this country with little or no school experience. Social, economic, and cultural factors in their home country may have interrupted their schooling—if, indeed, they attended school at all. The needs of these students are clearly much different from those of students with a solid academic background (McKeon, 1987).

3. **District or school resources.** Districts that have had a significant language minority enrollment for many years will likely have teachers, aides, and administrators trained to work with students who have limited English proficiency. They may be able to draw on a large pool of bilingual personnel in the community to staff bilingual programs. Other districts, faced with a sudden influx of students from one or more unfamiliar language backgrounds, may have to scramble to find qualified teachers or volunteers.

Material resources will also influence the type of program that a district or school may be able to provide. Districts with declining enrollments may have classroom space available for magnet programs or ESL (English as a second language) resource centers. Other districts may be so overcrowded they cannot even find a classroom to accommodate ESL pull-out classes (McKeon, 1987).

ESL Program Models

ESL programs (rather than bilingual programs) are likely to be used in districts where the language minority population is very diverse and represents many different languages. ESL programs can accommodate students from different language backgrounds in the same class, and teachers do not need to be proficient in the home language(s) of their students.

ESL pull-out is generally used in elementary school settings. Students spend part of the school day in a mainstream classroom, but are pulled out for a portion of each day to receive instruction in English as a second language. Although schools with a large number of ESL students may have a full-time ESL teacher, some districts employ an ESL teacher who travels to several schools to work with small groups of students scattered throughout the district.

ESL class period is generally used in middle school settings. Students receive ESL instruction during a regular class period and usually receive course credit. They may be grouped for instruction according to their level of English proficiency.

The ESL resource center is a variation of the pull-out design, bringing students together from several classrooms or schools. The resource center concentrates ESL materials and staff in one location and is usually staffed by at least one full-time ESL teacher.

Bilingual Program Models

All bilingual program models use the students' home language, in addition to English, for instruction. These programs are most easily implemented in districts with a large number of students from the same language background. Students in bilingual programs are grouped according to their first language, and teachers must be proficient in both English and the students' home language.

Early-exit bilingual programs are designed to help children acquire the English skills required to succeed in an English-only mainstream classroom. These programs provide some initial instruction in the students' first language, primarily for the introduction of reading, but also for clarification. Instruction in the first language is phased out rapidly, with most students mainstreamed by the end of first or second grade. The choice of an early-exit model may reflect community or parental preference, or it may be the only bilingual program option available in districts with a limited number of bilingual teachers.

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Late-exit programs differ from early-exit programs "primarily in the amount and duration that English is used for instruction as well as the length of time students are to participate in each program" (Ramirez, Yuen, & Ramey, 1991). Students remain in late-exit programs throughout elementary school and continue to receive 40% or more of their instruction in their first language, even when they have been reclassified as fluent-English-proficient.

Two-way bilingual programs, also called developmental bilingual programs, group language minority students from a single language background in the same classroom with language majority (English-speaking) students. Ideally, there is a nearly 50/50 balance between language minority and language majority students. Instruction is provided in both English and the minority language. In some programs, the languages are used on alternating days. Others may alternate morning and afternoon, or they may divide the use of the two languages by academic subject. Native English speakers and speakers of another language have the opportunity to acquire proficiency in a second language while continuing to develop their native language skills. Students serve as native-speaker role models for their peers. Two-way bilingual classes may be taught by a single teacher who is proficient in both languages or by two teachers, one of whom is bilingual.

Other Program Models

Some programs provide neither instruction in the native language nor direct instruction in ESL. However, instruction is adapted to meet the needs of students who are not proficient in English.

Sheltered English or content-based programs group language minority students from different language backgrounds together in classes where teachers use English as the medium for providing content area instruction, adapting their language to the proficiency level of the students. They may also use gestures and visual aids to help students understand. Although the acquisition of English is one of the goals of sheltered English and content-based programs, instruction focuses on content rather than language.

Structured immersion programs use only English, but there is no explicit ESL instruction. As in sheltered English and content-based programs, English is taught through the content areas. Structured immersion teachers have strong receptive skills in their students' first language and have a bilingual education or ESL teaching credential. The teacher's use of the children's first language is limited primarily to clarification of English instruction. Most students are mainstreamed after 2 or 3 years.

Characteristics of an Effective Program

Researchers have identified a number of attributes that are characteristic of effective programs for language minority students.

1. Supportive whole-school contexts (Lucas, Henz, & Donato, 1990; Tikunoff et al., 1991).

2. High expectations for language minority students, as evidenced by active learning environments that are academically challenging (Collier, 1992; Lucas, Henze, & Donato, 1990; Pease-Alvarez, Garcia, & Espinosa, 1991).

3. Intensive staff development programs designed to assist *all* teachers (not just ESL or bilingual education teachers) in providing effective instruction to language minority students (Lucas, Henze, & Donato, 1990; Tikunoff et al., 1991).

4. Expert instructional leaders and teachers (Lucas, Henze, and Donato, 1990; Pease-Alvarez, Garcia, & Espinosa, 1991; Tikunoff et al., 1991).

5. Emphasis on functional communication between teacher and students and among fellow students (Garcia, 1991).

6. Organization of the instruction of basic skills and academic content around thematic units (Garcia, 1991).

7. Frequent student interaction through the use of collaborative learning techniques (Garcia, 1991).

8. Teachers with a high commitment to the educational success of all their students (Garcia, 1991).

9. Principals supportive of their instructional staff and of teacher autonomy while maintaining an awareness of district policies on curriculum and academic accountability (Garcia, 1991).

10. Involvement of majority and minority parents in formal parent support activities (Garcia, 1991).

Conclusion

Successful program models for promoting the academic achievement of language minority students are those that enable these students to develop academic skills while learning English. The best program organization is one that is tailored to meet the linguistic, academic, and affective needs of students; provides language minority students with the instruction necessary to allow them to progress through school at a rate commensurate with their native-English-speaking peers; and makes the best use of district and community resources.

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